

WCN-SMcCall
ENV-4.00/PRJ-13.00

Subject: Wayne N. Aspinall Unit Operations

Dear Interested Party:

Enclosed is a summary of our August 23, 2001 meeting to coordinate Reclamation's operation of the Aspinall Unit. Also enclosed are copies of exceedence curves that were not included in meeting handouts. Highlights of the operation meeting include:

–April-July unregulated inflow to Blue Mesa Reservoir was 506,000 acre-feet this year. This is considered a “moderately dry” year. It is expected this inflow would be exceeded in 75 percent of years. April-July flow at the Whitewater gage (730,000 acre-feet) near Grand Junction was also considered moderately dry and would be exceeded in 78 percent of years.

–A 2,000 cfs peak flow through the Gunnison Gorge was provided in May to benefit downstream endangered fish habitat. This peak used 12,000 acre-feet, of which 7,000 acre-feet was bypassed around the Crystal powerplant. A flow of around 600 cfs was maintained at other times through the Gunnison Gorge, except for a 1 week period beginning July 4 when releases from Crystal were increased by 50 cfs to maintain 300 cfs below the Redlands Power Canal diversion. Blue Mesa reached a maximum elevation of 7502 feet in June, 17 feet short of filling this year.

–Maintenance activities were discussed, including plans for cleaning trash racks at Morrow Point Dam in 2002 or 2003, and removing gravel deposits at the upper end of Crystal Reservoir starting in October 2001. The potential for these activities to increase sediment discharge into the Gunnison Gorge and Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park was discussed. Planning, NEPA compliance, and scheduling of these activities is ongoing.

–Flows through the Gunnison Gorge will be maintained at around 600 cfs for the remainder of the year; these flows will be re-evaluated when initial snow survey data are available next January. Blue Mesa elevation will reach around 7480 by the end of December, thus the icing target will be met.

–Dr. Duane Vandebusch, history professor from Western State College presented a very interesting slide presentation on early explorations of the Black Canyon.

If you have any suggestions on improving the operation meetings or the summaries of the meetings, please let us know. The next operations meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, January 31st** at the Montrose Pavilion. If you have questions, please call me at (970) 248-0652.

Sincerely,

/s/

Dan Crabtree
Water Management Group Chief

Enclosure
Distribution (see attached list)
bc: w/ enclosure

Curecanti Field Division, Attention: CCI-100 1820 South Rio Grande Avenue, Montrose CO

81401

John Bezdek, Office of Interior Solicitor, 1849 C St. NW, Mail Stop 6412, Washington, D.C.
20240

Regional Solicitors Office, Salt Lake City UT
Attention: Jim Karkut

Regional Director, Salt Lake City UT
Attention: UC-400, UC-434, UC-438, UC-600, UC-723, UC-720, UC-726 (ea w/encl)

Director, Technical Service Center, Denver CO
Attention: D-8510 (w/encl)

WCN-CDeAngelis, SMoyer, EWarner, SMcCall, JOzga, CStanton, MSteves,
RStorbo, JWright, DCrabtree (ea w/ encl)

WCS-RSwickard, JSimons, PPage (ea w/encl)

Distribution List -August 23, 2001Aspinall Operation Meeting

*An asterisk indicates person attended the meeting

Argonne National Laboratory John Hayse, Kirk Lagory
City of Grand Junction Greg Trainor
Club 20 Stan Broome
Colorado State University Brett Johnson
Daily Sentinel Dave Buchanan
Environmental Defense Fund Jim Martin
Gunnison Basin POWER Ralph (Butch) Clark*, Ramon Reed
Gunnison Country Times Pat Daniel
Gunnison River Expeditions Hank Hotze Bo Gates
Helton & Williamsen, P.C. Duane Helton
High Country Citizens Alliance/Sierra Club Steve Glazer*
Matt Owens Fly Company Matt Owens
Trout Unlimited Pat Oglesby, Melinda Kassen
Western Colorado Congress Fred Wetlaufer
University of Montana Jack Stanford
Co. River Water Conservation District . . . Dave Kanzer*, Marlene Zanetell. David Halford, Ray Tenney
Colorado River Energy Distributors.....Cliff Barrett
North Fork Water Conservancy District Tom Alvey
Redlands Water and Power Company Gregg Strong*, Mike Gross*
Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association Marc Catlin*, Jim Hokit
Upper Colorado River Commission Everett Sunderland*
Upper Gunnison R. Water Conservancy District Kathleen Curry, Mark Schumacher, Tyler Martineau, Dennis Steckel, Jim Slattery

Tri-County

Water.....Mike Berry*

Delta County Commissioners Donna Ferganchick, Jim Ventrello
Delta County Duane Freeman
City of Delta Richard Sales, Wilma Ervin
Gunnison County Commissioners
Colorado Department of Agriculture Jim Miller
Colorado Division of Water Resources Wayne Schieldt, Frank Kugel*, Richard Rozman
Colorado Division of Wildlife Daniel Brauch,,Sherman Hebein*, Pat Martinez, Rick Anderson
Colorado Water Conservation Board Randy Seaholm, Ray Alvarado*, Michelle Garrison*
Wyoming State Engineers Office John Shields
Congressman Scott McInnis Joy Peck
Senator Wayne Allard Shane Henry
Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell George Rossman ,Katie Aggler
Army Corps of Engineers Grady McNure
Bureau of Land Management Allan Belt, Dennis Murphy, Jim Ferguson, Carl Bauer, Roy Smith, Jim Ferguson, Rooster Barnhart
Fish and Wildlife Service Rick Krueger, Frank Pfeifer, Al Pfister* Chuck McAda, Terry Ireland* George Smith
National Park Service Sheridan Steele*, Myron Chase, Ken Stahlnecker* Mark Wondzell* Ron Thomas, Bill Hansen, Chuck Pettee
National Weather Service Bill Reed, Brian Avery
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration Andrea Ray*, Klaus Weickmann
U.S. Geological Survey Paul von Guerard*, Bob Boulger*, Bob Jenkins, Gordon Mueller
Land and Water Fund Bart Miller
Western Area Power Administration Shane Collins*, Clayton Palmer
Jeff Ackerman ,Kathy Crane*, Ken Green, Annette Falvo, Ken Otto,Gary Burton; Margaret Matte

Bureau of Reclamation...Carol DeAngelis, Sue Moyer, Ed Warner*, Steve McCall*, Coll Stanton*, John Ozga, Russ Storbo, Ruth Rydiger, Gary McDermott, Don Phillips*, Dick Girvan, Arlo Allen, Jane Blair, Paul Davidson*, Tony Morton, Terry Stroh*

Interior Solicitors Office..... Jim Karkut,John Bezdek, Peter Fahmy

Department of Justice.....Dave Gehlert

Western Slope Libertarian Party Mike Humbert*

Aspinall Unit Operation Coordination Meeting
August 23, 2001

Participation: This meeting was held at the Elk Creek Visitors Center on Blue Mesa Reservoir. Attendees are noted on the distribution list.

Purpose of Meeting: The purpose of these meetings-- held in January, April, and August-- is to gather input for determining upcoming operations for Blue Mesa, Morrow Point, and Crystal Reservoirs. This input is used in Reclamation's development of an overall 24-month study for operation of Reclamation projects in the Upper Colorado River Basin, which includes plans for Glen Canyon, Flaming Gorge, and Navajo Units as well as the Aspinall Unit. Operation of the Aspinall Unit considers projected inflows to its reservoirs, flood control needs, existing water rights, minimum instream flows, target elevations for reservoirs, flow needs for endangered fish and other resources, recreation, hydropower needs and other factors. In addition, the meetings are used to coordinate activities and exchange information among agencies, water users, and other interested parties concerning the Gunnison River.

Handouts provided included data on April-August operations; projected inflows to the reservoirs; and potential operation plans under maximum, most, and minimum probable water supply forecasts.

Activities related to long-term operation planning were also discussed at the meeting. Many of the field studies leading to flow recommendations to help recover downstream endangered fish and to quantify a Federal reserved water right for the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park have been completed and an application to quantify the reserved right has been filed. The Fish and Wildlife Service draft flow recommendation report for endangered fish in the Gunnison River was also discussed. These operation meetings will be used more in the future to discuss proposals for long-term operation plans to address these and related resource management issues.

Operations:

April-August 2001 Operations: Actual April-July unregulated inflow to Crystal Reservoir was 599,000 acre-feet; unregulated inflow to Blue Mesa was 506,000. Through the winter and spring the forecasted unregulated inflow to Blue Mesa varied from 485,000 to 560,000 acre-feet, which is less variation than we usually see. The inflow placed us in a "moderately dry" year category; the 2001 inflow would be expected to be exceeded in 75 percent of years, based on historic records. At the Whitewater gage, April-July unregulated flows were around 730,000 acre-feet, a number that would be expected to be exceeded in 78 percent of years.

Peak inflows into Blue Mesa were around 4,500-5,000 cfs. Reclamation provided a peak of 2,000 cfs through the Black Canyon in May to benefit downstream endangered fish habitat. With ramping, this peak used 12,000 acre-feet of water, of which 7,000 acre-feet bypassed the Crystal powerplant. Peak flows at the Whitewater gage reached a little over 5,000 cfs. Fish and Wildlife Service draft flow recommendations would call for a peak of around 7,000 cfs in a moderately dry year such as this.

Black Canyon flows, other than during the peak, ranged around 600 cfs. Releases were increased from Crystal Dam by 50 cfs between July 4 and 11 in order to maintain flows of 300 cfs downstream of the Redlands Diversion Dam in fulfillment of the 1995 Memorandum of Agreement between Reclamation the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Colorado Water Conservation Board for Furnishing Water for the Endangered Fish. Blue Mesa Reservoir reached a maximum elevation of 7502 feet, approximately 17 feet short of filling.

August-December 2001 Operation: Flows through the Black Canyon are projected to be around 600 cfs. As runoff forecasts for 2002 become available, the release pattern will be adjusted. Blue Mesa Reservoir will reach an elevation of 7480 feet by the end of December.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife requested flows of 600 cfs between September 25th and 28th for their Gunnison Gorge fishery monitoring. This will be no problem this year. The Fish and Wildlife Service would like draft flow recommendations followed where possible. For the remainder of the year, this means Reclamation will try to maintain a 300 cfs minimum below the Redlands Diversion for the months of July, August, September, and October as per the 1995 MOA.

The Colorado River Water Conservancy District and Colorado Water Conservation Board expressed concern regarding the April operation meeting. It was their understanding the meeting concluded with a plan for no peak flow, yet a small peak was implemented. Reclamation acknowledged the receipt of a letter from the Colorado Water Conservation Board which expressed the misunderstanding plus pointed out other needed corrections to the April meeting summary. This letter, along with a corrected copy of the summary, has been placed in Reclamation's official Aspinall Operations file. Reclamation agreed that the process at the April meeting could have been clearer and efforts will be made to avoid future misunderstandings. The Conservation Board asked if the Fish and Wildlife Service monitored this year's peak to see if there were any habitat benefits. The Service indicated that flows reached a level at Whitewater that would move sediments based on past studies, but no actual monitoring was done this year. The Conservation Board asked that monitoring be done in the future to see the actual results of spring peaks.

It was suggested that graphs shown at future meetings include historical averages for Crystal releases to demonstrate how operations have changed.

Aspinall Unit Maintenance Work: A draft EA is out for review on dredging a gravel bar in the upper end of Crystal Reservoir. The work is to be scheduled for the October 1-November 30 period 2001. The work will not affect water levels or release patterns downstream of Crystal Reservoir. Material dredged will be used by the National Park Service and Colorado Department of Transportation. Water quality is the main concern with the project and pre-project water quality monitoring results were presented. Cleaning Morrow Point trash racks has not been firmly scheduled but could occur in the fall of 2002. Information gained from the dredging work will be incorporated in the upcoming trash rack EA.

Agency/Organization Activities and Discussion of Related Activities:

National Weather Service-El Nino and La Nina are in a neutral pattern and there are no clear long term trends. Ongoing research may someday help narrow the difference between minimum and maximum probable conditions. See www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov for additional information.

Fish and Wildlife Service - FWS believes the small spring peak was beneficial. Draft flow recommendations are still being reviewed. Meetings are scheduled in September to address concerns of some reviewers. Two razorback suckers and 1 pikeminnow used the Redlands fish ladder so far this year.

Generally the draft report calls for a more natural hydrograph, with magnitude of the spring peak varying with the amount of unregulated inflow at Whitewater. A base flow of 300 cfs downstream from the Redlands Diversion is discussed in the report. The types of peaks discussed are listed below (draft) –these are flows at the Whitewater gage so they include flows from the North Fork, Uncompahgre and other tributaries as well as from the Aspinall Unit:

Extremely dry year-4,000 cfs or greater
Moderately dry year- 7,000 cfs or greater
Average dry year-9,500 cfs or greater
Average wet year-12,500 cfs or greater
Moderately wet year-16,000 cfs or greater
Wet year-18,000 cfs or greater

Upper Gunnison Water Conservation District-Working on a flow/water management plan for the upper Gunnison.

Colorado Division of Wildlife - Colorado River rainbows and Gunnison River rainbows have recently been stocked in Crystal Reservoir, downstream from the reservoir, and downstream from the Gunnison Tunnel Diversion Dam.

Colorado River Water Conservation District - Hopes that misunderstanding from the April meeting concerning planning of a peak flow can be avoided in the future.

Western Area Power Administration - Requested that NPS provide dates when the Morrow Point Tour Boat season was to end this year.

National Park Service -A change of venue for the reserved right filing is progressing. NPS is still interested in a stay of litigation to allow negotiations. NPS and USGS completed field work on vegetation in the Black Canyon in July. Results will be published.

Other - It was pointed out that most of the meeting participants did not receive the normal invitation letter/agenda. Dan Crabtree will check into this issue to insure everyone is properly informed.

Next Meeting - January 31st 2002, 12:30 Montrose Pavillion.

At the end of the operations meeting Dr. Duane Vandebusch from Western State gave a very interesting slide show of the early surveying expeditions into the Black Canyon and of construction of the Gunnison Tunnel. There were some very tough and creative people in those days!